

The Hilliard Haunting

Although this story takes place in Hilliard, Ohio, it is completely fictional and any similarities between this or any other works is strictly coincidental.

The Hilliard Haunting

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“When black cats prowl and pumpkins gleam,
may luck be yours on Halloween...”

-Unknown Author

ON THE BANKS OF THREE-MILE CREEK
WEST HILLIARD, 1980

Jefferson Collins wiped the sweat from his forehead as he knelt down under the kitchen sink in the house that he and his crew had just constructed. The pipes under the sink were leaking, so his team had been called back to fix it and do one final walk-through before the Watkins family moved in the next day.

It was said that this would be the Watkins' dream home – from the blue prints to the countryside location – the woods and Three Mile Creek in their backyard, cornfields as far as the eye could see - everything was decided on by them personally.

“Jeff! Hurry up, we have to get moving out!” one of his crew called to him, his voice echoing from the empty and hollow living room. Jefferson tightened the pipes with his wrench and looked it over – it all looked good.

Jefferson walked out the front door with his toolbox in one hand, and locked the door with the key in his other. He walked towards the truck where the three other members of his team stood waiting for him.

A cool wind blew in from the south, quivering the cornfields to the right of the property. *Kill them...*

Jefferson stopped in the middle of the front yard and looked towards the cornfield. He then peered down the side of the house towards the barn in the backyard. The locked barn sat still in front of a canvas of dead trees and the creek.

Kill them...

The autumn breeze carried in the whispering words he'd been hearing all week on the property. Jefferson wasn't sure if it was just in his head, or if it was something more sinister.

"Maybe I will," Jefferson said under his breath. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes, everything was foggy and distorted. There was a ringing in his ears – a commanding one.

The ill-omened voice had convinced him it was what he needed to do. With a crash, his toolbox hit the ground and opened up, spilling out all of its rusted contents.

Jefferson clenched his hand into a fist, and released the hidden blade from the box-cutter he threateningly held in his callused grip.

Kill them...

Jefferson approached his men, the autumn sun glistening in the blade...

THE WATKINS RESIDENCE
WEST HILLIARD, 2005

HALLOWEEN

Five students stepped out of a white minivan, as did their driver and teacher, Mr. Vincent, and walked up towards the large house on Amity Road. They walked up the remainder of the gravel driveway, holding their notebooks and pencils. One of the students carried a voice recorder and another carried the school-issue video camera. They were doing a project this Halloween – an interview that Mr. Vincent had been trying to secure since he started teaching at Darby High School four years earlier.

It was an interview with Seth and Elizabeth Watkins, the elderly couple who lived in the big house on Amity Road with their caretaker, Valerie. The property on which they lived was the backdrop to a triple homicide the day before they were supposed to move into the house back in October of 1980.

When the police arrived at the property that next morning, Jefferson Collins was still there and confessed to killing his three other crewmembers. Although a solid motive was never exposed, sources said that Jefferson heard voices on the property – voices telling him to protect the land and kill those men. He told police that the grounds were home to a witch named Raven who once lived there.

Jefferson was arrested and locked up in a maximum-security prison two hours north of Columbus, Ohio. Despite the brutal crimes, Seth and Elizabeth moved in as soon as they could, and had made it their permanent residence.

Mr. Vincent led his five students to the front door of the Watkins home and knocked gently. The door opened a moment later and a woman in her mid-thirties answered. She greeted them with a smile and introduced herself as Valerie Warner.

“Good afternoon, Valerie. My name is Mr. Vincent; you can call me Steven though. These are my students from Darby High: Ava, Mason, John, Melissa and Corey. We’d like to thank you and Mr. and Mrs. Watkins for letting us stop by for an interview.”

“It’s no problem, Mr. Vincent,” Valerie said, “please, come in.”

Valerie let the six of them into the house. It was a large house – a lot of open room and old antique furniture. A grand piano sat in the far corner of the living room covered by a white sheet. The furniture was old, but looked brand new – it was barely used. An old chandelier hung from the ceiling.

“If you all will wait a moment, I’ll go get Mr. and Mrs. Watkins,” Valerie said as she left the living room, disappearing into the house.

“Any place with a white sheet-covered piano is already creepy in my book,” Mason, a senior, joked. He got a chuckle out of his classmates.

Ava, another senior with her long blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail, walked over to the staircase that led upstairs

and put her hand on the rickety old railing. She looked upstairs and then stepped back. “It sure is dark up there.”

“Okay everyone, stay together,” Mr. Vincent said. “Mr. and Mrs. Watkins are finally letting us into their home for the interview, and I don’t want them to regret their decision by seeing everyone walking around getting into stuff.”

The five students gathered around together and waited for the caretaker to bring the hosts into the room.

Ava looked to the right, where Valerie had exited the room, and then to the left where there were two large windows covered by black curtains. She walked over to the curtains and pulled them back to reveal the windows were painted black; you couldn’t see in or out of them.

“Hm,” Ava said, “I wonder why -”

“Please don’t touch anything, young lady,” an older woman spoke. Everyone’s attention turned back to the right where Valerie brought Elizabeth Watkins in, in her wheelchair. “Those curtains are very old and I don’t want you to rip them.”

“Sorry, ma’am,” Ava said, re-joining the rest of her classmates in the center of the living room. Behind Valerie and Elizabeth, Seth Watkins was walked in slowly, trying to balance with his walker. He was obviously suffering from Parkinson’s disease with his uncontrollable shaking, but still managed to sneak out a smile to everyone.

“Mr. and Mrs. Watkins,” Mr. Vincent began, “thank you both for letting us into your lovely home. We really appreciate your time.”

“Well, you’ve been asking long enough,” Elizabeth said in her shaky old voice.

Valerie helped Seth sit down on the couch, and wheeled his wife right up next to him. Seth reached his fragile hand out and rested it on his wife’s lap.

The students each sat down in whatever seat they could find, and Mr. Vincent took center stage.

“Well, let’s begin so we can let you two enjoy the rest of your Halloween evening. I’m sure you’re expecting a bunch of trick or treaters tonight,” Mr. Vincent said with a smile.

“We don’t get a whole lot of that nonsense out here,” Elizabeth said. She looked up at Valerie who stood next to her. “You can leave us be, darling. I’ll ring the bell if I need you.”

“Certainly,” Valerie said. She smiled at the guests and then left the room.

Mr. Vincent looked to John, who was holding the voice recorder, and gave him the OK to hit the little red button. On that mark, Corey, the only freshman in the group, lifted the video camera, aimed it at the old couple, and began rolling.

Mr. Vincent continued, “Well, I’ve been trying to do this interview for almost four years now, because I think it’s a big part of Hilliard’s history. Three people were murdered on your property the day before you were supposed to move in. Now, there is a lot of mystery that surrounds this crime.”

“Indeed there is,” Elizabeth said.

“First of all, I’d just like to know in general, why move in after something so horrific happened?”

“It was our dream home. We put a lot of time and money into getting this home built. We weren’t going to just abandon it.”

Mr. Vincent scribbled down in his notepad, as did the students. “My next question, do you think this was an act of cold-blooded murder? Or do you believe the spirit of a witch named Raven really could have spoken to Jefferson Collins?”

Elizabeth pointed to the wall with the windows that were painted black. “There’s nothing supernatural about this property or the cornfields out there.”

Ava noticed which wall she was pointing too. On the other side of those windows was the cornfield. Did the Watkins’ not want to see what was out there? Or did they not want something to see inside?

Elizabeth continued, “That man, Jefferson Collins, was mentally insane. He took the box cutter from his toolbox

and slit those poor men's throats. There was nothing supernatural about that at all."

The old woman was starting to get visibly frustrated. Seth just sat on the couch, not saying a word to anyone. Mr. Vincent, slightly put off, continued anyway:

"Over the past few decades, especially the last couple of years, there have been strange occurrences out here on Amity Road and the surrounding country roads. Strange howls in the night, reports of mysterious fires in the middle of the cornfields - some people tell stories about their pets going missing around here and never turning up again."

"Mr. Vincent," Elizabeth said, "I'm not long for this world. Seth and I are knocking on death's door. The only reason I agreed to do this God forsaken interview was to set the record straight. There was never a witch named Raven and there is no haunted cornfield. Seth and I have lived here for twenty-five years, and not once have we been spooked by anything!"

The five students set their pencils down and felt nervous by Elizabeth's shouting.

"Mrs. Watkins, I apologize for any -" Mr. Vincent began but was then interrupted by Elizabeth picking up the bell that Valerie had sat next to her and frantically ringing it.

"What about the black paint on the windows?" Ava called out, silencing the ringing bell.

Elizabeth looked directly at Ava, as the room grew silent. “What did you say, young lady?”

“The cornfield is on that side of the house,” Ava said, pointing behind her. “The same side that you have the windows blacked out on. Why are they blacked out, Mrs. Watkins? Is there something you don’t want to see out there in the cornfield? Maybe you saw something that frightened you? Maybe you didn’t want someone, or *something*, to be looking inside the house?”

Elizabeth snarled and started ringing the bell again, faster this time.

“Alright,” Mr. Vincent said to his class, “it’s over. Turn the camera and recorder off.”

John and Corey shut their equipment off and abruptly, all the lights in the room shut off. The students all screamed.

“It’s just a power surge, guys.” Mr. Vincent tried to calm his students.

Elizabeth shed a sinister smile. “Is it?”

The house slowly began to darken into murky shadows, and the students panicked. Melissa dropped her notebook and ran towards the front door, but by the time she got there, the house had already surrendered to unnatural darkness.

Nobody could see anything. There was a loud hiss that emerged from the darkness, and then an even louder shriek from Melissa.

The light bulbs on the chandelier above flickered on and off and everyone saw quick, terrifying glimpses of Melissa's bloody body hanging from it. The flickering lights went out for good and the screaming came to an abrupt end, leaving only echoes lingering in the hauntingly dark house.

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